A Critique of Middle-class Indian People (MIP)

Introduction

In India, the key role of the middle-class/salaried-class citizens is seldom recognized and often underplayed.

The Middle-Class Indian People (**MIP**) not only constitute the majority (60-plus percent) among all population segments or socio-economic classes but are a virtual backbone of the Indian economy and society, given their immense, indispensable contributions to the workforce, tax revenue and the fact that they are the mainstay of consumption. Above all, theirs is the pivotal role as voters in the "world's largest democracy".

Yet, the MIP have always been a disempowered, marginalized lot, having no major say in the affairs of the State, except for a periodic vote. Even that vote has been traditionally manipulated through rhetoric, emotion, false promises, election-games, quid pro quo or cash, and then subsequently used as a carte blanche by the Establishment to do anything and everything until the next vote is due.

In between, the virtual carte blanche is used to do things for which there has been no mandate in the first place. Even anti-MIP (anti-people) policies are enacted on the basis of the vote received, in the name of democracy and parliamentary majority. Once the periodic vote is cast, MIP are seldom consulted on important matters relating to both State/society and personal and community life. MIP don't have the power to recall elected representatives. MIP's interests are seldom championed or served by the current system, which is a flawed, corrupted, abused and subverted variant of parliamentary democracy, a travesty of people's will (as evidenced recently in Maharashtra in November 2019 – did citizens in Maharashtra vote for a coalition of the Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress-I to rule them? Does the post-poll coalition of BJP-NCP faction of Ajit Pawar, secretly inflicted on millions of unsuspecting voters by a handful of powerful politicians, a testament to democracy? Is trashing pre-poll alliances after results are out democracy?)

MIP's attitude to life, community and society

MIP have traditionally been playing a docile, passive, defensive role in society. This can be attributed to their DNA in part as well as the cultural conditioning that comes from experiences, environment and mental hardwiring through subliminal messages in the national discourse (media, entertainment content of movies and TV, popular fiction, interpretations of epics and scriptures, ad and marketing messages, web content), history of colonial conquests and servitude to kings and feudal lords, and so forth.

MIP's timid, detached, and apathetic approach to community manifests in the form of play-it-safe attitude and risk-aversion, which are seen as virtues, indispensable for livelihood (which take the form of celebration of a life of mediocrity, lacking a spirit of excellence, and a shameless pursuit of the Mammon).

The environment (read the Establishment) or the social framework ensures most of the MIP stay not only divided — cooperation, collaboration, understanding and united collective action are unknown commodities — but egotistical, greedy, cowardly, emotional, selfish, self-centered and narrow-minded. Some refer to MIP as the "grabber class", always seeking "more, more, more". It's very easy to "divide and rule" MIP, because they can seldom agree on anything among themselves.

Typically, an MIP settles for a humdrum life of a monthly salary job in a career in the government service, or PSUs, banks, or in the private sector (particularly the manufacturing sector or services like the IT, aviation, transport and hospitality industries). He/she pays income tax (or tries to minimize/evade it), complies with law (only when others are watching), tries to save a lot of money.

The inner focus of his mind is mostly on amassing as much as possible, so he could afford the goodies of life and own other major assets, to get ahead in the rat race, or at least not lag behind others, and to enjoy the comforts, and afford the pleasures of material life.

It is not uncommon for MIP to compromise on principles, morals and ethics to earn more or to get ahead of others, due to erosion of timeless reference points in the mindscape, brought about by sustained exposure to a value system that glorifies material benefits as the purpose of life in human form.

IQ and EQ tend to be very low among MIP. Nor do they have a global outlook, cosmopolitan attitude, global manners, etiquette, etc. Deep knowledge of world affairs, and basic civic sense, are rare. Many of them don't even really understand the larger system of which they are part, or have been born into but seldom thought about. Many of MIP don't know the contents of the Indian Constitution, the IPC, etc. They suffer from a chronic addiction to superficial knowledge and cursory interest in things relating to being a good citizen of an evolved society. But most of MIP revel in being argumentative. They confuse domain expertise or reasonable competence in their chosen field for success and genius, due to lack of global benchmarks.

MIP also take delight in running down their peers, or squaring up against them in perceived "intellectual" discussions (hot-air venting) at social gatherings and on social media. They tend to specialize in non-cooperation, back-biting, backstabbing, gossip, and seldom take the plunge into anything that is constructive or productive or selfless. While being naïve and unsuspecting toward the elite, they are unreasonably

suspicious about the motives of proactive peers who display a sense of initiative.

Even when the ecosystem, the larger societal framework as well as environment/nature, degenerates or decays due to the excesses, or incompetence or ineptitude, of the "Establishment" (a class comprising descendants of erstwhile maharajas, feudal lords, zamindars, the filthy rich, the nouveau riche, and past-their-prime celebrities, corrupt bureaucrats and might-is-right musclemen and strongmen — goondas, rowdies, thugs, thieves, rapists, murderers — all of whom find a backdoor entry to the corridors of powers through manipulated elections, bought/extracted votes, nominated sinecures), MIP remain unbothered, focused on their personal interests, not at all invested in the larger community.

"Community", "society", "nation" and "environment" are matters too BIG for MIP, who consider themselves "too small" (false modesty/humility). They either misinterpret dharma/responsibility or portray apathy, indifference, fear, cowardice, greed, and selfishness as virtues. "Every person should mind his own business, and not hurt others, and not pollute the environment. That's what I do. If everyone is like me, then there won't be any problem. But if there are problems out there, then the people (Establishment/government/authorities) whose job it is to resolve them, are not doing their job properly. I can't be bothered. I have done my bit — I pay taxes, I cast my vote, I abide by the law. I shall focus on my own self, and be a good person. That is my dharma. If the ecosystem is collapsing all around me, so be it. I am not responsible. There's nothing I need to do about it."

Most MIP do not have a 'Big Picture' perspective. Nor do they recognize the utterly interconnected, inter-dependent, matrix-like nature of all things, systems, lives in this 21st-century, globalized world. They don't even see themselves as part of the ecosystem. They don't see they are dependent on the ecosystem. They don't recognize that they need the ecosystem to enjoy their own lives. They feel entitled to a good life. They see the purpose of life in human form is to get ahead in the rat race, and enjoy the material realm as much as possible, in an utterly selfish, self-centric way. They are blind to the fact that the larger socio-politico-economic system they help perpetuate (by blindly accepting it, following it, or not resisting it when it turns evil) actually devastates millions of lives, communities and societies, and nature, elsewhere. They, they would argue, are too small a fry to be thinking or worrying about the macro scene.

Key reasons behind MIP's apathetic, hands-off attitude toward community

Selfishness: This malady has roots in the perception that the material pie is limited, in short supply, hence expensive, so to get as much of it as possible as soon as possible, the rat race has to be run (some unethically, immorally, by compromising on timeless principles), to get ahead of others, run over other MIP, with intense focus on self, personal interests, family, kith and kin, to the exclusion of community, society, nation.

Cowardice/fear: This malady has to do with the idea that activism, community work, taking part in movements or protests, playing a proactive role in matters relating to community or society could lead to trouble in personal life, risk what had been already secured, and eventually end up in huge "losses", while conceding lead to those in the rat race who stick to personal interests. The other fear is the vague idea that the Big Brother, or the "Bad Guys", will target and victimize any potential threats, so better not get into the bad books of villains who can break your limbs, put you in jail, implicate you in some criminal case, or get you killed. "They are too powerful and dangerous." Another fear is that employers may sack one from the current job for taking part in patriotic activities or social activities. Yet another fear is about perceived disagreements, discord, and other such risks affecting relationships.

Greed: When community activity or society-related work is not mandatory, and if there are no immediate incentives, it's best to focus on selfish interests all the time and maximize gains. Take more, give less or nothing, if that could be helped.

Erosion of reference points: In the name of Kali Yug, or all-round degeneration of values, MIP adopt immoral practices and unethical conduct, and superimpose the notion of virtue, shrewdness and "practical approach" on such choices. Timeless values are not even in the mental frame of reference because of ignorance and wilful or unwitting distancing from them, due to preoccupation with material pursuits.

Rat race and **busy-ness**: MIP love to race in the rat race, and explain away such self-centric indulgences and life choices as the harsh reality of modern, hectic life, without which even survival becomes difficult. Life is so busy-busy that there is little time for anything other than self, personal interests and family matters.

Blind acceptance of smallness: The larger society controlled by the elite (the Establishment, which has direct or indirect control over all mass media, national discourse and mass messaging systems) constantly reinforces the idea that MIP are inconsequential, powerless, inferior, helpless and defenseless. National affairs, societal issues are the domain of "big people", and "small people" ought not to interfere because they are too complex to understand, and too dangerous to wade into.

Ignorance: Most MIP go through their lives without being aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens, and the larger system or society, and finer details of the dynamics and mechanics of the 'Big Picture'. They feel it's okay not to bother, it's okay to live one's entire lifetime totally focused on self, personal interests, and family matters. They are not aware of the reality of the globalized world where everything is not only interconnected but interdependent; they are ignorant that individuals can't really consider themselves cut off from the rest, that we are all responsible for each other directly or indirectly.

'Zombieness': Modern tech-dominated societies inflict mind-numbing content and lifestyles that make people insensate, almost like robots or automatons, and people are hardly allowed a moment to take a step back, pause, reflect and comprehend the 'Big Picture'. And MIP also prefer it that way because truth / reality / consciousness is too painful to contend with. Escapisms like fantasies or unconsciousness are preferable to awareness, consciousness and evolution.

Ego: This is not just an ordinary malady but a deep-seated disease, and a side-effect of received smallness. MIP can't cooperate or collaborate with each other unless there's some immediate mutual benefit. They will likely take the excuse that there is no proper, safe platform for them to come together to act collectively. And when an MIC (Middle-class Indian Citizen) does take the initiative to create such a platform, or do something "big" or unusual (from fellow MIP's perspective), or achieves something, or is on course to success, other MICs not only feel jealous or envious but angry and bitter, thus refusing to cooperate, back or extend support; sometimes, one MIC sabotages the other. The larger system (read the Establishment) is invested in feeding each individual ego versus another MIP ego because of the old trick ("divide-and-rule"). Instead of "win-win" among MIP, you will see in each MIC this: "I'm alone okay, the rest of MIP are not only not okay but zero(es)".

Laziness: MIP are not inclined to contribute any of their resources (time, energy, skills, money, intelligence, etc) for a larger cause if there are no clear and immediate personal benefits, and especially if it involves a bit of thinking and physical as well as intellectual work. While physical energy is sapped by the material pursuits and hectic lifestyle, work, and so on, mental energy is drained in arguments, inner conflicts arising from compromise of conscience, self-doubts, lack of self-confidence, lack of non-domain knowledge. Community work and contributions to society are seen as optional, a luxury. In terms of concept, they may be agreeable to joining forces, but when it comes to actually taking the plunge and contributing by way of real work, they prefer to ride piggyback on others' efforts, and stay in the background, until the time to reap rewards arrives.

Consequences of MIP attitude to themselves, community and society

Travesty of democracy: As long as the majority MIP accept their smallness as their destiny or fate, and desist from playing a bigger role in society, the minority elite will continue to subvert, corrupt and make a mockery of democracy.

Degeneration of society: A society where the majority are selfish, self-centric, zombie-like, irresponsible, powerless, weak, silent, drifting and suffering will fast degenerate into a farce.

Rise of authoritarian regimes: Lack of resistance to the disempowerment of the masses will result in concentration of power and authority in a few hands, which is the

precursor to authoritarianism and totalitarianism.

Globalization effect: A society where individuals are preoccupied with their little domains and lack a 'Big Picture' perspective, lose sight of the reality of the globalized 21st-century world, where both opportunities and threats abound. Where unity and collective action could make them winners globally, they will end up losers in their own community/society due to sustained selfishness and disunity. If they can't connect and empathize with others, then others certainly won't come to their rescue when external help is essential for survival.

Business, technology and entertainment will zombify and disempower: As consumers, viewers and tech-users, MIP will have no power at all as individuals. "Customer is king" will remain just a fancy lie – "customer is a sucker" will become reality. All privacy laws will be violated with impunity. Personal data will be stolen. Substandard goods and services, and very poor 'customer service' will become the order of the day. Inane, puerile or obscene content and brain-damaging video games will pass for entertainment. Trends like artificial intelligence, big data, cloud computing, autonomous driving, robotics, etc, will eventually take over MIP's sub-human, mechanistic role, making ordinary people dispensable.

Lower classes' anarchy: Meanwhile, while MIP remain preoccupied with their selfish ways, lower classes, whose aspirations have been unleashed by media, but who have been marginalized by ever-widening income inequalities, will likely become restive, potentially sparking violent protests, even revolutions, that will eventually end in anarchy and destruction of what MIP helped create, thereby depriving everyone of a chance to actually own that which had been created.

Climate change, environment, ecology: Crass consumerism arising from selfish consumption of greedy MIP will make manufacturing and development unsustainable, depleting natural resources beyond natural replenishment or regeneration rates. This will lead to a chain reaction that will pollute everything, and unsettle ecosystems, eventually causing catastrophes, lack of food, rain, extinction of species, so forth.

Sub-human life lacking in dignity: When intellectual and spiritual evolution does not progress to the higher level, life in human form will lose meaning and purpose, degrading the society in every conceivable way, as people live just to eat, drink, perform ablutions and reproduce – a state worse than that of animals.

Conclusion

It is high time that MIP realize that a perfect storm is building. And unless and until they, being the majority, review and reform their ways, as well as their approach to community, society, environment and life itself urgently, they will find themselves at a cliff edge – a point of no return – sooner than later.